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Quality Work Life among Factory Workers in Malaysia

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Abstract

Quality of Work Life among employees is important as it entails strong participation in many of the programs organized by firms. Moreover, having quality work life will lead to better well being of the workers and society. This study was conducted at one of the largest factories in northern part of Malaysia. With a respond rate of 70%, Pearson correlation indicates that job satisfaction, job involvement and job security have significant relationship with quality of work life. The study contributes to the mainstream knowledge of the work life study as it delineates the situation from the perspectives of locals working in multinational firm.

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1. Introduction

Quality of work life (QWL) is one of the most important issues in every organization. When organization offers quality of work life to their employees, it is a good indicator to boosts its image in attracting and retaining employees. This is important as it indicates firms are able to offer appropriate working environment to employees. Eventually employees will have high commitment and ultimately reduce costs that incur due to high level of stress. Hence, by having quality of work life, the firms can

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enjoy increased organizational productivity and higher opportunity for growth with better participation from employees (Beauregard, 2007).

QWL is defined as quality of human experience as they interact in employees-organization relationship (Saklani, 2004). Thus, management must pay attention to employees' well-being as strong workforce will benefit organization. Furthermore, Greenhaus (1987) suggested that quality of work life is related to employees' satisfaction and work related behaviours. Once the employees experience enjoyment in working at an organization, they would feel satisfied and influence their commitment in their daily tasks. In addition, the quality of work life also has significant impact to the society. A happy worker will experience positive feeling and this feeling is carried to their family and the society. Thus, since today's life demand is quite stressful, quality work life is important as it contributes to the environment as well as family structure by offering ways to fulfil individuals responsibilities (Bagtasos, 2011). This study attempts to add to the area of QWL research in developing and enhancing human capital. Due to limited studies on QWL in multinational firms, this study will give insight to the quality of work life among the employees at the respective firms. These firms with headquarters in home country implement their structures locally which question their ability in meeting employees' needs. This is especially true as QWL is less emphasized in Asia as compared to North America and European countries (Bagtasos, 2011). Accordingly, this study attempts to identify the relationship among job satisfaction, job involvement and job security with quality work life.

2. Previous Literature

The development of QWL can be traced way back to the earlier management era. Management theories such as Frederick Taylor and Elton Mayo suggest that human is important in determining firms' performance (Bagtasos, 2011). Though both have contrasting ways of looking at human aspects, with Taylor being more quantitative, while Mayo focused more on human and environment, their ideas on appreciating human as a person is valid. The recent development on QWL is further enhanced by the needs theory (Maslow hierarchy of needs, Herzberg's Two factor theory, McClelland three needs theory and Alderfer) and spillover effect (Sirgy Efraty, Siegel & Lee, 2001). These theories suggest that the basic needs of individual surface from time to time and there are some spillover effect to their personal life and family.

Traditionally, management encouraged employees to separate between work sphere and family sphere. This situation proposes that work and individual life functions separately. Thus there is no conflict (Titmuss 1968). However, current social and demographics changes view that individual will function effectively only when the work and personal life are balanced. This situation gives rise to the study on QWL.

Studies on QWL were diverse. The focus is on work variables and non-work variables. Some attempt to identify the effects of QWL towards customers' satisfaction (Lau & May 1998), while others determine the relationship between QWL and productivity (Bagtasos, 2011). These authors discovered that QWL benefits firms in the long run as it enhances long term relationship with customer and finally the firms' growth. In other studies by Normala (2010) and Ma, Ma, Yu & Hao (2011,) QWL is found to have a significant relationship with organizational commitment. The study supports another contribution by Bhatia & Valecha (1981) and Kavoussi (1998) who suggest that the absenteeism rate decreases with the increase in QWL. In another study by Koonmee, Singhapakdi, Virakul & Lee (2011), QWL mediates the relationship between institutionalization of ethics in firms with job related outcome. These studies indicate the importance of managers to understand QWL in order to increase firms' performance.

Besides commitment, job satisfaction is also viewed as the outcome of QWL (Lee, Singhapakdi & Sirgy, 2007; Johnsrud, 2002; Karrir & Khurana 1996). These studies indicate that employees feel

satisfied towards their job once QWL programs are present. Job satisfaction is also an indicator for QWL. By definition, job satisfaction is “a pleasurable or positive emotional state due to appraisal of one’s job experience” (Locke & Lathan 1979). Hence, once a person feels satisfied, he is expected to be willing to participate and this leads to his improvement on his quality work life. Meanwhile, job involvement is defined as the degree of psychological identification that meets one’s needs. (Kanungo, 1982). In a study by Igbaria, Parasuraman & Badawy (1994), job involvement can enhance individual experience that contribute to quality of life, but in some situations, job involvement will lead to a more stressful life. Meanwhile, job security refers to perceived level of stability and continuance of that job (Probst, 2010). It is expected that once a person perceives job security, he is more willing to become an active participant which leads to a higher QWL. A study by Cuyper & Witte (2010) suggests that job insecurity will result in different attitudes and well being among permanent and non permanent employees. Based on the above literature, there is no conclusive evidence on the relationship among job satisfaction, job involvement and job security towards QWL. Thus, this study investigates this relationship.

3. Research Methodology

This study was conducted at one of the largest manufacturing firms in Malaysia. This multinational firm declares that it “strives for work balance and global diversity”. The instrument used was a set of questionnaires adapted from various sources. Quality of work life questions was adapted from Sirgy et al. (2001) while a short version of Minnesota Satisfaction questionnaires was used to gauge on job satisfaction aspects of the respondents. The questions for job involvement were adapted from Kanungo (1982) and questions for job security were adapted from Oldham, Kulik, Stepina, and Ambrose (1986). All in all there are 50 items in each set of the questionnaires. Reliability test revealed that these questions are reliable with Cronbach-alpha of 0.734-0.777. A self administered questionnaire was administered to the respondents from February 2011 until March 2011.

4. Findings

A total of 170 respondents were chosen to participate in this study. However, only 120 responded with usable questionnaires. With a respond rate of 70%, it is found that most of the respondents are undergraduate, single, male and have less than five years experience working in that organization. Majority is full time employees working as supporting staff. The data reflect the populations as most of the workers are having the same criteria. The details of the respondents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The demographics of the respondents

Demographic variables	Frequency (n=120)
Gender:	
Male	54.2
Female	45.8
Marital status	
Single	55
Married	45
Educational level	
High school	47.7
Undergraduate	50.8
Postgraduate	2.5
Years of service	
< 1 year	24.2
1 but less than 5 years	41.7
5 but less than 10 years	19.2
>10 years	15
Management level	
Managerial	14.2
Supporting staffs	85.8
Employment status	
Full time employees	65
Internal temporary worker	3.3
External temporary worker	26.7
Apprentice program	5

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, Pearson correlation test was run on the data. The result shows that job satisfaction, job involvement and job security has a significant relationship with the quality work life. The strength of correlation is higher for job satisfaction with $r=0.733$ whilst the strength of relationship between quality work life and job involvement and quality work life and job security is moderate with $r= 0.47$ and $r=0.447$ respectively (Table 2.0).

Table 2. The correlation between quality of work life and job satisfaction, job involvement and job security

		job satisfaction	job involvement	job security
QWL	Pearson Correlation	.733(**)	.470(**)	.447(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	120	120	120

In order to explain more on the relationship among job satisfaction, job involvement and job security with QWL, a regression analysis was run on the data. As VIF is less than 5.3 and tolerance value is more than 0.19, the variables are acceptable as there is no multi collinearity issues. The standardized coefficients for job satisfaction is 0.639, for job involvement is 0.205 and for job security is 0.037. The beta coefficients indicates the relative importance of each individual variables, thus it shows that job satisfaction explains more of quality of work life. Nevertheless, caution is proposed as this is true when dealing with the similar variables. Table 3.0 shows the details.

Table 3. The regression result of quality of work life with job satisfaction, job involvement and job security

Model	Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)		1.461	.147		
job satisfaction	.639	9.374	.000	.778	1.285
job involvement	.205	2.687	.008	.624	1.603
on job security	.037	.469	.640	.582	1.719

Model summary (Table 4.0) shows how much these variables explain quality of work life. The result indicates that 57% of the variance is explained by job satisfaction, job involvement and job security. Hence it is possible to say that 57% of the combination of job satisfaction, job involvement and job security is able to explain quality of work life in the sample.

Table 4. Model summary of the regression analysis between job satisfaction, job involvement and job security

Model Summary ^b				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.762 ^a	.581	.570	.30178

a. Predictors: (Constant), This section is on job security, This section is on job satisfaction, This section is on job involvement

b. Dependent Variable: This section is on QWL

5. Conclusion

The results above indicate that there is a significant relationship between job satisfaction and quality of work life. Job satisfaction is found to carry more weightage in explaining the relationship among job satisfaction, job involvement and job security with quality of work life. Similar findings were found by Koonmee et al. (2010), whereby job satisfaction and organizational commitment are related to quality

work life. Moreover, Drobnic, Beham & Prag (2010) suggest that employees that have secured jobs and pay would feel comfortable at the work place and this affects their quality of life.

Understanding workers feeling is crucial for management as it functions like a domino effect. A satisfied employee is willing to contribute more and participate well in any programs proposed by the firm. Having quality work life leads to a better society with more innovation and success. The firm in this study has used many means to up-grade the quality of work life among its employees. Some of the organizational activities encouraged by the firm is employees volunteer group where it nurtures leadership among its staff, employees privilege programs where it instills the sense of belongingness among staff in the firm and employees development program for employees growth and development. Many of these activities are developed to help employees manage their work commitment and personal life. Managers and subordinates in this firm are willing to share experience and work together in order to achieve the firms objectives. One good example can be seen through their corporate social responsibility program such as “one person one can”, whereby every level in the firm contributes to the success of the program.

This research, however has certain limitation. The study does not look into the environmental factors that affect the workers QWL. However, as the firm is located in one of the busiest state in the nation with high cost of living, knowing that the firm has initiative to handle programs in order to balance work-life among its employees is pacifying. Future research could use the findings from this study to identify on local firms initiative towards quality of work life among their employees. There are many programs which have been implemented by this multinational firm. These programs are also being implemented by their subsidiaries in other countries. Though locals have different cultures, the basic foundation prevails: employees are human beings who make up the whole universe, once they feel happy at the workplace and enjoy working, the society at large will benefit as well. The spillover effect of QWL is obvious. Thus, management should appreciate the notion that employees with high commitment and positive work attitude contribute to firms success. Evidently, the environmental effect that the firm creates support the workers quality of worklife.

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